



The Public Health Committee Hearing

**Testimony in Support of SB 257
An Act Concerning Hepatitis C Screening**

**Submitted by
Gloria Searson
President
Coalition on Positive Health Empowerment**

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Good morning, my name is Gloria Searson and I am the President of the Coalition on Positive Health Empowerment (COPE). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Connecticut's hepatitis C community.

COPE is a membership organization dedicated to empowering people living with Hep C to be their **own** healthcare advocates. We work within underserved communities that are often disproportionately affected by viral hepatitis and similar illnesses. COPE accomplishes this by offering various levels of service through both direct to client services and expert's training. Examples include Supportive Services (Hep C testing, adherence & Mental health counseling, nutrition, behavioral modification and self-advocacy), Educational services (train the trainer & monthly Hep C community forums), Advocacy (founding member of National Hepatitis Day Committee and White House World Hepatitis Day Panelist), and Research (Clinical trial partnerships and published journal articles). We strive to eliminate the stigma and discrimination often associated with chronic illness. I understand the devastation attached to this stigma and discrimination not only because I work in this field; but because I am one of the millions of Americans who live with HEP C.

Overall, COPE is pleased to see that the Senate Bill 257 to require primary care providers to offer Hepatitis C screening to patients born between 1945-65 – aka "Baby Boomers", has been introduced. The State of Connecticut now has the opportunity to ensure that this legislation is enacted.

Viral hepatitis is a silent epidemic in the United States and more than 3 million Americans are living with chronic hepatitis C, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Over time, chronic hepatitis C can lead to serious liver problems including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure, or liver cancer. Every year, thousands of Americans die from liver disease associated with viral hepatitis.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has recently released a report detailing birth cohort testing guidelines that identified baby boomers, or those born between 1945 and 1965, as at risk for

hepatitis C. There are an estimated 3.2 million Americans infected with hepatitis C, 75% of whom were born between 1945 and 1965. According to the CDC report, 45-85% of individuals living with Hepatitis C are unaware of their infection status.

Hepatitis C is curable! Requiring primary health care providers to offer the hepatitis C test to baby boomers is crucial to our communities. Knowing their hepatitis C infection status will allow individuals to take steps to prevent infection or have the opportunity to seek treatment and care, which can save our healthcare system hundreds of thousands of dollars.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this important bill that will save thousands of lives for people in Connecticut and look forward to seeing an improvement in the quality of life of many of our baby boomers.